



Morning Alert - Tuesday, December 19, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that several people were killed and many injured when an Amtrak train derailed south of Seattle on Monday morning. Most commercial networks led with reports that giant panda cub Xiang Xiang will make her public debut at the Ueno Zoo today. TBS ran a follow-up report on the alleged assault by sumo grand champion Harumafuji.

Most national papers gave top coverage to general contractor Obayashi Corp's acknowledgement that it was involved in bid-rigging with other contractors, including Kajima Corp. and Shimizu Corp., in the maglev construction project linking Tokyo and Nagoya. Nikkei's top item was Toyota's announcement yesterday that it will increase its production of electric vehicles.

SECURITY

U.S. military to resume CH-53E helicopter flights today

All papers highlighted an announcement made by the Okinawa Marines yesterday that the cause of the recent fallen window mishap involving a Futenma-based helicopter was an error on the part of the crewmembers, who failed to comply with the safety manual and forgot to check whether the window in question was attached to the aircraft by wires ahead of the flight. The U.S. military reportedly informed the Defense Ministry on Monday that it plans to resume flights by CH-53Es as early as Tuesday since appropriate safety measures are now in place. The U.S. military reportedly pledged that it will try to avoid flying aircraft over schools in the vicinity of Futenma Air Station "as much as possible." Okinawa has already reacted sharply to the planned resumption, with Governor Onaga saying, "We will never accept the business-as-usual approach taken by the U.S. military and the GOJ." Mainichi's headline reads: "Okinawa is neglected" by the U.S. military.

Top U.S. Navy official pledges utmost efforts to ensure safe flights

Asahi reported that visiting Adm. John Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations, met with Defense Minister Onodera in Tokyo on Monday and commented on the fallen window mishap involving a USMC CH-53E in Okinawa by saying: "We would like to take thorough measures to prevent this type of incident from recurring."

Nikkei took up the admiral's courtesy call on Prime Minister Abe on the same day, during which the two officials agreed to apply maximum pressure on North Korea until it takes concrete steps toward denuclearization. They also agreed to deepen mutual cooperation for ensuring peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.

Abe administration eager to support "Buy American" campaign

Asahi focused on the steady increase in the nation's defense spending since the second Abe administration was launched in 2011, attributing it to the prime minister's strong interest in procuring American defense hardware such as F-35As and Ospreys. The daily voiced qualms that the administration's policy of introducing U.S. defense equipment appears to be picking up further momentum following the inauguration of President Trump, who is putting pressure on Washington's partners to "buy American." While noting that some MOD officials are concerned that Japan will be forced to purchase costly U.S. equipment at the expense of other defense necessities, the daily said the procurement of U.S. weapons systems is now viewed as a "political matter" that MOD and SDF officials cannot object to.

Japan to export engine parts for U.S. fighter jets

Nikkei wrote that Japan's National Security Council decided yesterday to export to the U.S. four components of an engine for use in the U.S. military's F-15s and F-16s, explaining that the USG had requested these parts since they are no longer produced by American defense contractors. The GOJ is hopeful that the transaction will help empower the nation's defense industry since the engines using the Japanese components will be used in fighter jets operated not only by the U.S. military but also the militaries of some 20 U.S. allies, including Israel, Turkey, and Egypt.

Chinese jet fighters travel over Sea of Japan for first time

All papers reported on the MOD announcement on Monday that five Chinese military planes, including two Su-30 fighter jets, passed back and forth over the Tsushima Strait between Japan and South Korea and over the Sea of Japan earlier in the day, noting that this was apparently the first time for PLA fighters to fly over the Sea of Japan. Although SDF aircraft scrambled in response to the Chinese fighters, there was no violation of Japan's territorial airspace. The PLA Air Force later announced that five of its airplanes conducted a drill over the Sea of Japan, adding: "The Sea of Japan does not belong to Japan. The Tsushima Strait is not Japan's territorial waters. Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, all member states have the right to free overflight and navigation." Sankei said the first-ever flight over the Sea of Japan by PLA fighter jets signifies

Beijing's strong interest in expanding its power projection capabilities, adding that it constitutes an additional security threat to Japan.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. to highlight “peace through strength”

Most papers reported on Monday's release of a new National Security Strategy (NSS) by the Trump administration, noting that the document makes clear Washington's policy of ensuring global peace through building a powerful military, which marks a sharp contrast to the previous Obama administration's approach of exercising U.S. leadership abroad through dialogue and international coordination. Nikkei said as the USG under the updated security strategy is set to take a hardline approach toward North Korea, Russia, and China, Japan welcomes the Trump administration's greater engagement with East Asia. The daily said Katsuyuki Kawai, the special foreign policy advisor to the LDP president, and former White House Chief Strategist Bannon met in Tokyo yesterday and exchanged views on the NSS. Bannon reportedly explained that the Trump administration regards the U.S.'s deepening relations with regional allies as imperative.

DPRK warns of missile launch in near future

Yomiuri took up an article published in a DPRK Workers' Party organ on Monday that said every country has the right to develop and use space since there are no national borders or boundaries in space and that sabotaging the peaceful development of space constitutes a violation of international law. The daily interpreted these statements as a justification of launching a ballistic missile in the near future in the name of putting a satellite into orbit.

South Korea voices “disappointment” with Japan's plan to open World Heritage center

Sankei front-paged the disclosure by several diplomatic sources that the South Korean government has relayed to the GOJ its “considerable disappointment” over Japan's plan to establish in Tokyo in 2019 an information center on the nation's industrial facilities built in the Meiji era that were put on UNESCO's World Heritage list. According to the ROK, Korean nationals “were forced to work” against their will at some of those facilities during WWII. The South Korean foreign minister is likely to press Foreign Minister Kono to conduct a review of the planned opening when they hold talks in Tokyo today.

POLITICS

Next Diet session to begin on Jan. 22

Sankei claimed that the GOJ and the ruling coalition are planning to convene the next ordinary Diet session on Jan. 22, noting that it will last through June 20.

Foreign Minister Kono requests private jet

Most papers reported that Foreign Minister Kono asked Finance Minister Aso on Monday for funding to procure a small airplane such as a Gulfstream G650E to be used exclusively by the foreign minister when traveling overseas so that the minister does not have to rely on commercial airliners when travelling abroad. Kono justified the funding request by explaining that he has often declined invitations to lunch and/or dinner from his foreign counterparts on account of commercial flight schedules.

